

COLLECTANEA

SOCIAL FESTIVALS IN LADAKH KASHMIR

184 In that part of Western Tibet called Ladakh social functions differ in certain respects from those which exist in Lahul, though the inhabitants in both districts share a common language, Tibetan.

A

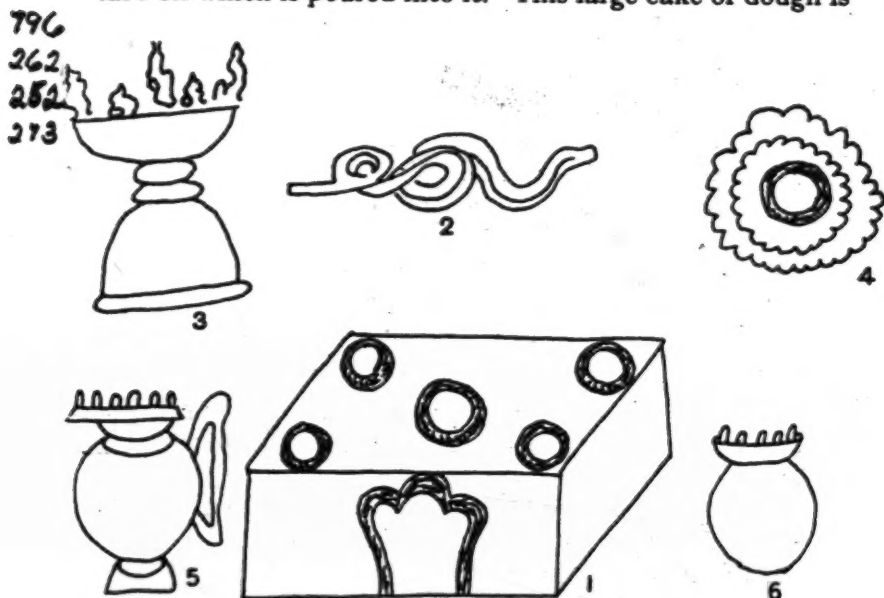
796 The New Year¹ festival begins on the 10th month of the
373 Tibetan calendar, continuing from the 25th until the 30th day. On the 25th day of that month each household prepares 30-40 little receptacles which serve as small lamps for illuminating the house. These are called *Bu-La*, and are made from the residue of mustard seed from which the oil has been extracted by pressure. The mustard oil is then poured into one such little lamp and a wick put in to float in it. These little lamps are lit at 8 o'clock in the evening. One such lamp is placed in the window of each room in the

¹ New Year

My Tibetan informant told me that originally the Ladakhis celebrated their New Year in the 12th month of their calendar as is the custom in other parts of Tibet, but in 1841-42 when the Dogras invaded Western Tibet and subjugated it, the Ladakhis decided to celebrate their new year in the 10th month so as to enable them to fight the invader. It is said that a large number of the Ladakhis having determined to take their wives and children along with them to the war, they were finally induced to forgo fighting altogether rather than expose their families [13] to the dangers and rigours of war. (For information concerning the conquest of the Western Empire of Tibet, see Dr. A. H. Francke's "A History of Western Tibet".) The Ladakhi new year has therefore been observed in the 10th month ever since.

196 house, whilst a number of them are arranged in a row near
373 the awning of the dwelling.

The members of the household then partake of *Tab-*
796 *Zan*. This consists of a large dish of parched barley dough
262 in the middle of which a hollow is made to receive the mus-
tard oil which is poured into it. This large cake of dough is



1. *rGya-Tab* (Stove). This is the common earthen stove used by Ladakhis. It is 3 feet square and 1 foot high. In the front there is an aperture for putting in the fuel of sticks and dried manure, and on the top of it there are three holes for placing the cooking utensils. 2. *Dib-Rug*. Sheep's intestines. 3. *Bu-La*. Little lamps made of dough. 4. *Tab-Zan*. Parched barley dough with a hollow in the centre in which mustard oil is poured. 5. *Kal-jor*. Beer pot. 6. *Za-rgyan*. An earthen vessel in which beer is kept. Sometimes used instead of the *Kal-jor*. Both are ornamented with butter pats on special occasions, and also serve as butter offerings.

796 then divided into four equal parts, one part (*Tab La Rgya-*
262 *Mo*), being placed on the earth stove (*Tab*) as an offering to the god of the hearth, one part (*Mag-Dung Rgya-Mo*) stuck on a large horizontal beam in the apartment, and one piece (*Sgo-Tag-Rgya-Mo*) stuck on the lintel of the front.

796 door of the house. When performing this rite the house-
262 holder says :

" Don't carry confidential news outside,
But bring popular gossip inside (the house)." 2

The fourth quarter of the dough cake is reserved for consumption by the family.

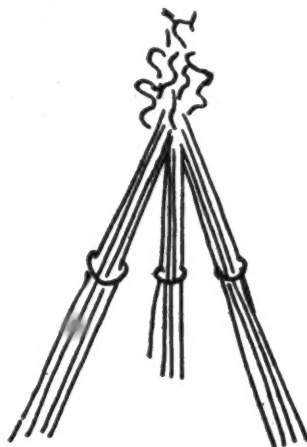
From the 25th-29th no social function is held, but all engage in feasting privately. On the 29th, however, the unripened barley grain left over from the harvest, the head feet, and stomach of a sheep, and peas, are all boiled together. It is then taboo for women to wash their hair, and 796 no one may go abroad for any purpose beyond the immediate vicinity of the village. It is thought that if this prohibition is disregarded, the *Nagpo Gunsum* (a black demon) will consume 796 every particle of food within their houses. The intestines 251 of the sheep already killed are filled with dough kneaded in sheep's blood, and a plate of this (*Dib-Rug*) is given and received amongst the neighbours. As a large amount of this delicacy is thus collected, what part of it cannot be consumed immediately is cut in slices, and strung through with yarn and hung in an empty room to be used as required.

796 The next day the families in the village proceed to their 262 respective cremation sites, taking with them breads, 782 parched barley, beer, meat, and other delicacies. Part of each kind of food thus taken is placed on a slab of stone in front of the cremating oven (*Dur-Kung*) for the ghost of the latest deceased relation. The remainder of the food is eaten by the relations on the spot. If there happen to be two or more parties visiting their own cremating ovens simultaneously, they pool the food they have brought and eat it together, having first performed the ceremony of offering food and beverage to the ghosts of the dead.

* Original Ladakhi dialect :

Nangi pe-ra chi la ma akyer
Chi logi pe-ra nang la kyong.

Directly after sunset the *Me-To* (3 bundles of willow and juniper branches) is carried outside each house together with a *Kal-for* offering (a pot of beer on the handle of which a butter impression called *Yar* has been made). A small quantity of beer is then sprinkled on the *Me-To*, and small fragments are taken from the *Yar* and smeared on the rims of the drinking cups belonging to the people assembled, and similar butter impressions made on the forehead of each person. The remainder of the beer having been imbibed, all return to their houses.

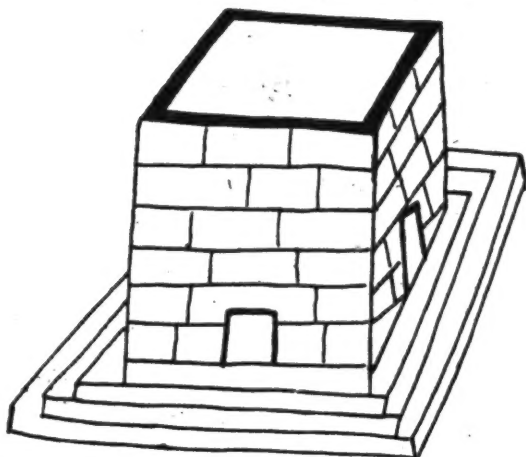


1. *Me-To*. Three bundles of willow branches kindled at the New Year celebrations.

The little lamps (*Bu-La*) are now lit once again, and all peer from their houses to see if the nobleman of the village (*Lon-Pu*) has kindled his *Me-To* (he having ascertained the propitious moment for performing this operation from the local astrologer (*Rtsi-Pa*)). The signal thus given, all emerge, light the *Me-To*, and carry the burning pieces of sticks to a piece of ground contiguous to a main thoroughfare. Throwing the kindled sticks on the ground one man says: *Ra lon ni gon-pa ritsi rug* (a spell against evil spirits) and all reply: *Ha sha la ha sha mi ka khyi ka* (a spell to prevent sickness, dog bite, and other kinds of misfortune).

796 On the 1st day of the 11th month, each household makes
 792 a dough effigy of an ibex (*Skyin*), a cake of unleavened bread with its edges turned up and inwards (*Pe-Rak*), parched barley flour placed in a wooden flour bowl (*Pe-Pud*) is prepared. A vessel of beer (*Nang-mChod*) and one of water (*Chu-Pud*) are also placed alongside of all these offerings, the whole being laid on a shelf in the apartment for three days.

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1. *Dur-Kung*. An earthen cremating oven set up on a plinth of earth. There is an aperture on each of the four sides to allow of ventilation, and ensuring a draught so as to expedite the burning of the corpse which is placed in it in a doubled up posture. The whole is made of dried mud bricks. 2. *Pe-Pud*. An offering of flour. 3. *Pe-Rak*. A cake of unleavened bread with edges turned inwards.

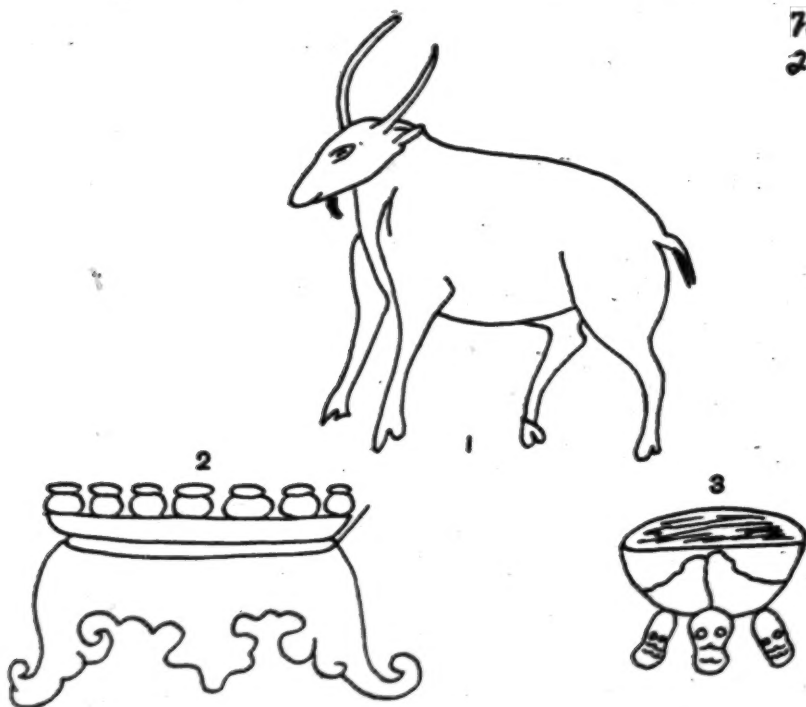
796 Friends, relations, and neighbours now call on each other
 574 carrying with them small vessels of beer and 5, 7, or 9
 685 breads (the taking of six breads being contra-indicated).

The children of the village in the meantime make a house to house collection of meat, bread, and other eatables. Whilst the housewife is engaged in producing the food thus claimed, a diversion is afforded when the children surreptitiously steal the *Skyin*, *Pe-Rak*, *Pe-Pud*, *Nang-mChod*, and the *Chu-Pud*, though receiving their ration of food from the incautious housewife.

On the 3rd day part of the offerings already mentioned 796 are devoted to the moon with the words: "Happy life, happy new year, happy day, happy stars." In cases where 782 the housewife has not been able to forestall the theft of the offerings by the children, fresh ones must be made and

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1. *Skyin*. Dough effigy of an Ibex. (4" long from crest to rump.) 2. *Chu-Pud*. These 7 cups of water used for sacrificial purposes are placed on a table as illustrated. 3. *Nang-mchod*. Vessel of beer made from a human skull. Sometimes the blood of sacrificed animals is placed in this bowl.

offered. The remainder of the *Skyin* and *Pe-Rak* offerings 796 are then distributed to the children, a girl giving the *Pe* 789 *Rak* offering to another of her own sex, and a boy bestowing 782 the *Skyin* offering to a male companion. The sport of arrow-shooting (*Da Rgyab-Ches*) is indulged for two days, followed ten days subsequently by one day of this sport.

B

796 On the 28th day of the 12th month, a festival called
778 *Doss-Mo-Che*³ is held in Leh the capital of Ladakh. People
751 from far and near attend this important function. The



1. *Doss-Mo-Che*. An effigy of a man with the yak's horns filled with blood. The whole is carried on a plank.

Lamas (priests) make a life-size effigy of a man (*Doss-Mo-Che*) with straw, adorning it with coloured garments. This effigy is then placed in a prominent position in the dancing

³ *Doss-Mo-Che*

It seems that the un-Tibetan part of the *Doss-mo-che* ceremony when the Sepoys of the Kashmir State play their part in destroying the effigy, is a concession to the now ruling Maharajah who is a Hindu and identifies himself with the Buddhistic practices observed in Ladakh. Once a year the Maharajah causes prayers to be read by the Buddhist clergy, and defrays the expense of feeding them during this period.

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floor of the monastery, and beer and grain are offered to it. 776
This is followed by a devil dance, the Lama performers 778
being arrayed in special dancing regalia and masks. The 751
next morning another devil dance is held; and about
5 p.m. the effigy is carried with great solemnity on a
plank to an open piece of ground outside the town. Two
yak horns (*Yak-I-Ru-Cho*) are filled with blood, and fixed
one on either breast of the effigy. A platoon of local sepoy
belonging to the Kashmir State then open fire on the horns
as a target, but fail to hit the mark. It is believed that as
the *Shu-Shog* (a high Buddhist ecclesiastic) has pronounced
a charm upon the yak horns they thereby become invulner-
able so long as that important personage remains near them.
When, however, this church dignitary takes his departure,
the sepoy return to the assault of the effigy, and succeed in
hitting the mark. This is the signal for the people to rush in
pell-mell with thorns which they lay at the foot of the effigy
and burn it. This ceremony is performed in order to fore-
stall sickness and other misfortunes to the community.

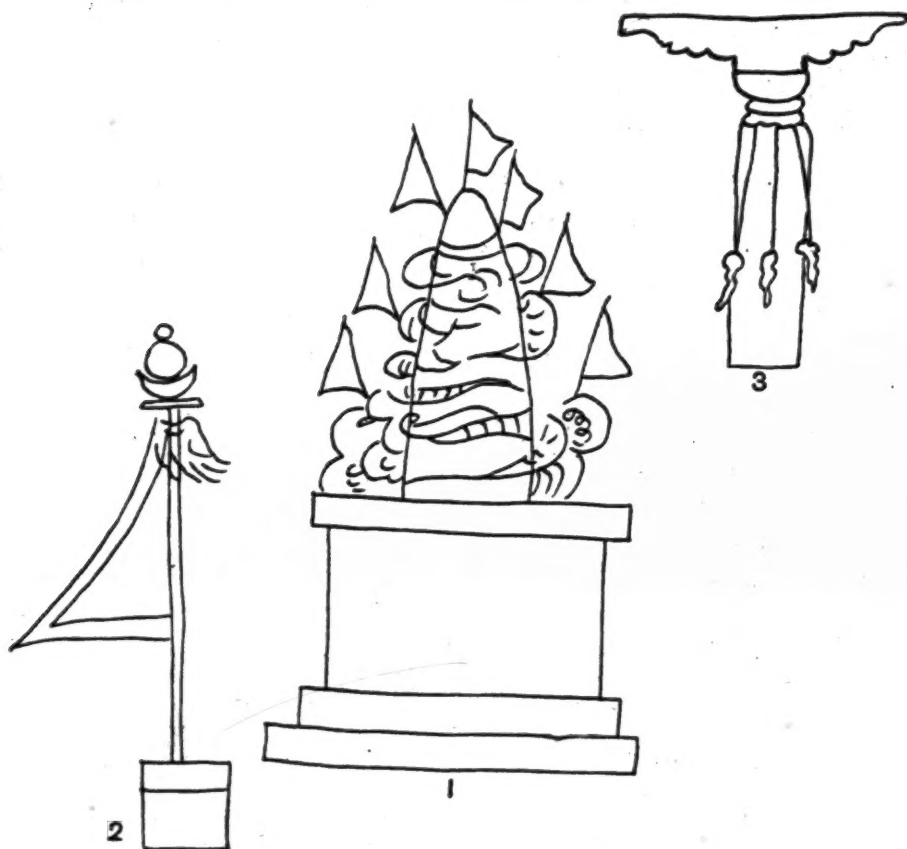
C

On the 8th day of the 1st month a *Tse Shu* (popular
amusement or sport) is held for all the villagers. This
function occurs once a month, when barley flour dumplings
are made, the various households taking it in rotation to
provide food and drink for those who assemble to dance and
amuse themselves in various ways.

D

On the 15th day of the 1st month, males and females
circumambulate prayer walls and monasteries in order to
obtain merit. They perform this ceremony in procession.
If a woman in the procession meets anybody she must give

796 that person a handful of roasted barley (*Skor-Yos*). On
782 this day the Rajah of Stog (a village in the Indus valley
near Leh) sends three *Kal* (120 lbs) of roasted wheat to
certain villages in which he has a special interest in land



1. *Hla-To*. A cairn with a pole in the middle round which horns of animals, flags and other relics are placed. 2. *Dar-Chen*. The flag pole with a yak's tail on it, which is erected near the *Hja-To*. 3. *Shrub-Hla*. The first fruits of the harvest attached to an upright post supporting the roof of a house.

or other property. This store of wheat is placed at the confluence of three roads through which the circumambulators will pass, and his agent doles out a cupful of grain to each devotee. Moreover, such of the villagers who desire to obtain merit and have not joined the procession, take it

upon themselves to regale the pilgrims with grain, and beer. 796
This is, however, a purely voluntary act. 782

E

The act of ploughing and seeding (at the end of the 4th 796
and beginning of the 5th month) is preceded by an offering 782
of butter, flour, and beer, a small pat of butter being stuck
on the crown of each man's head. The handle of the plough
(*Shol*), the oxens' heads, and the handle of the wood spade
(*Pak-Tsa*) with which the women harrow or beat the clods
of earth after ploughing are similarly dealt with. Whilst
the assembled people eat and drink the remainder of the
offerings, the following prayer is offered :

- * May the plough remain unbroken ;
- May a good harvest and blessings to our house ensue ;
- Sow the seed.
- May the youths and maidens gather in a good harvest ;
- May the carrying in of the harvest by the maidens have
no end ;
- May the reaping by 100 youths have no end ;
- May the yatra * festival and weddings ensue ;
- Cause 100 large bins of grain to be filled.

* Original Ladakhi dialect

A kanas ma ka nas
a chi li gi man dra li
Sa bon debs
Nyi ma da bi ta yang shog
Na chung rgya si skyas te mi tsar ches
Kyogtong rgya si rnga ches mi tsar ches
Ya tra dang bag ston btang ches yong chu ga mdzad
Rgya bang rgya gang chu ga mdzad.

* Ya-tra

Is a feast when the villagers are regaled with beer, dumplings, and 769
pastry. It is held in autumn and winter in memory, and for the benefit
of the souls of those that died during the last year.

F

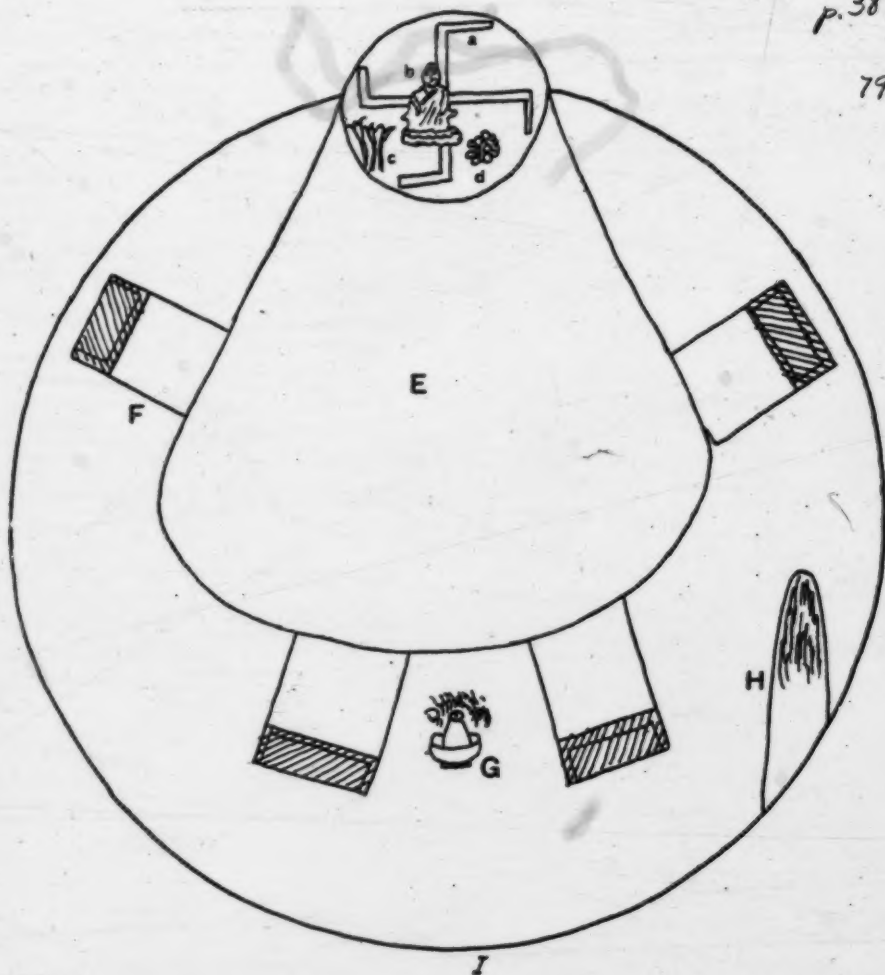
796 On the 10th day of the 7th month the festival of *Shrub*
252 *Hla* (god of the ears of corn) is held. This ceremony
institutes the reaping of the harvest. No one may put his
hand to a sickle until this function is celebrated. Barley
and wheat are boiled until the grain is soft, when it is
spread out to dry. It is then roasted, milled into flour,
and finally kneaded into dough balls. The first ears of corn
and the first fruits of the pea and buckwheat crop are next
mixed into the dough balls, each family taking this to its
family cremating* oven. Sheaves of grain are then fixed
to the beams of the household temple, and also on cairns
(*Hla-Tl*) in the neighbourhood.

796 On the completion of a feast in celebration of the in-
783 gathering of the crops, three men proceed to the nearest
brook, taking a live sheep with them. There they have to
bathe their bodies, and also dip the sheep in the water by
way of purifying themselves and the animal. It is believed
that once the sheep has been thus cleansed, it does not
attempt to wander or escape. Leading the sheep, the trio
makes for the local cairn (*Hla-To*) to which sheaves of corn,
coloured rags, willow branches, and the tail of a yak are
attached. Lots are now drawn amongst the three men to
ascertain who must carry out the ceremony of sacrificing
the sheep to the god.

796 The man thus chosen then proceeds to make a large
incision in the breast of the sheep and tearing out its heart

* *Cremating Oven*

764 This oven is made from sun-dried mud bricks. Its dimensions are :
3 feet square and 4 feet high. On each of the sides is a small aperture
about a foot from the bottom of the oven as vent holes. The corpse's
back is broken immediately after death and the knees are drawn up to
the head and tied securely. It is then carried on a man's back to the
oven in which it is placed resting on stones placed at the base of it to
serve as a grid. The more opulent prepare a box in which they place
the corpse.



I. The large circle "I" represents the threshing floor. (*Ulag*) (*Wones*).

E. Is the heap grain piled in the centre of the threshing floor. In the small circle which is the flattened portion of the pile of grain are placed :

- (a) Grain hollowed out in the form of a swastika (*Yun-drung*).
- (b) An image of the Buddha (*Shu-dra*).
- (c) First ears of grain harvest. (*Shrub*).
- (d) A small pile of oxen's droppings. (*Lcha*).

F. The four bags (grain. *Tib. Pad*) with their open ends close to the heap of grain, and the closed ends doubled back.

G. Flour and rancid butter on the top of which are placed live charcoal causing smoke and an offensive smell which is supposed to be pleasing to the god. This offering is called *Sur*.

H. A long stone sprinkled with vermillion (*mTsan-rdo*) erected on the edge of the threshing floor to keep down the vampires and thereby prevent the grain from decreasing. In other parts of Western Tibet, the long stone is substituted by an axe which is supposed to be equally effective.

796 with all speed and placing it on the cairn of stones. He next skins the sheep and distributes portions of the flesh to the assembled people, each person receiving a portion which he holds over a fire which has previously been lit, until the meat is singed. This he eats immediately. All then return to a specified meeting-place where several large earthen vessels (*Za-Ma*) of beer are imbibed. This done all the males belonging to a group of villages proceed to a pond where they wash their bodies.

G

796 During the 9th month when threshing the grain on the
533 threshing floor the following eulogy of the oxen is sung:

' May the grain increase like the ring marks on your horns ;
Your eyes are like black pupils ;
Your nostrils like pipes of brass ;
Your upper lips are like a golden tablet ;
Your lower lips like a turquoise tablet ;
Your tongues are like knotted ice ;
Your throats like a pipe of beads (rosary) ;
Your livers glisten like ice ;
Your lungs are like a red lake ;
Your abdomens are like a square temple ;
Your hides like a black and white plain ;

* Original Ladakhi dialect

Ru cho chong ri mug chung wongs kyong wong bo rog
Mig mo nag ga pa ni
Na kung zang si pu ri
Al pags gser gi lag shing
Mal pags u-i lag shing
Lche mo dar gi dud pa
Ol dong mig pai trang
Chin pa gangs ri dkar po
Hlo wa mtso mo ma bang
Jang kok hla kang dru bzhi
Pags po tang kar tang nak
Nga ma dir kak gyun dra
Ldad pa chu ton ton skor pin
Nye chu tung du cha cha skor pin

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Your tails are as fine as a sinew ;

You have gone round the threshing floor until the
sweat broke upon you ;

You have gone round until your tendons contracted.

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When the grain threshed by the oxen has been winnowed, 796
the ceremony of blessing the grain is performed. Around 782
the heap of grain four grain sacks, with their open ends
facing the heap, are laid in the form of a square. Fried
barley flour and butter (*Sur*) is placed on the threshing floor
at the circumference of the heap of grain, whilst the drop-
pings of the cattle (*Lcha*), an image of the god of harvest
(*Sku-Dra*), and a few grains of corn (*Shrub*) are imbedded
in the pile of grain. Scattering a few grains of corn hither
and thither, a man invokes the god by saying :

I offer this ;

Oh Aria the Lord of wealth, may the grain increase
as the droppings from the oxen.*

The 17th and 18th days of the 10th month are times 585
specially assigned for the celebration of marriages. These
ceremonies held in Ladakh suffer very little modification
or addition in ritual, for departure from the accepted
customs handed down by tradition is considered to be
an affront to the communal conscience.

WALTER ASBOE

AN IRISH FOLK-POEM

THE following poem was taken down, in 1933, on the Great
Blasket Island, Kerry, from the singing of Peig Sayers the story-
teller (see *Béaloides*, vol. II, p. 108). As I have never seen another
version in any collection of Irish folk-poems or elsewhere, it may
be of interest to have it recorded here, in the Blasket dialect,

* *Original Ladakhi dialect*

mChod

Nor gi bdag po a-ri-a rdzam pa la.